



Board of Commissioners

201 West Kalamazoo Avenue • Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007-3777
Phone: (269) 384-8111 • Fax: (269) 384-8032

TO: House Transportation Committee
FROM: Deborah Buchholtz, Chair, Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners
REGARDING: Testimony Concerning HB 4366 and HB 4367
DATE: March 9, 2011

Chairman Opsommer, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the House Transportation Committee on HB 4366 and 4367, two bills that taken together, are very important to the continued consolidation of countywide public transportation in Kalamazoo County. As Governor Snyder and the Michigan Legislature look to local governments for models of reform, consolidation of services, and more efficient ways of serving citizens, they have only to look as far as Kalamazoo County for a shining example. Consolidation of public transportation in Kalamazoo County is an excellent example of local governments working together to overcome turf wars and funding disputes to create new models of public service. These two bills, if adopted into law, would represent a collective partnership involving nearly every local unit of government in Kalamazoo County, the Governor's Office and the Legislature to accomplish a major, real-life objective.

Our community has been engaged in a ten-year long process of creating a truly integrated countywide public transportation system. For many years, Kalamazoo City (through its Metro Transit Authority) operated a line haul system within the city limits, and provided limited line haul service by contract to some local jurisdictions adjacent to the city. The City also provided a very limited ADA (Americans with Disability Act) - required demand-response service. In addition, the County operated a demand-response system, called Care-A-Van, that provided service to the entire county. The two systems overlapped and duplicated services, did not coordinate well, and were in competition with each other for funding. The effort to consolidate began in 2001 and 2002 as an argument between the City of Kalamazoo and the County of Kalamazoo over distribution of Federal Act 5307 funds. That fight continued through most of 2003 until both the City and County, with the partnership of other local governments, determined to stop fighting and work together to build a system that served, to the best of its ability, all the citizens of the county.

Since that time, the City and County have worked together and with other local units, including the City of Portage and all of Kalamazoo County's townships, cities and villages, to merge the two systems into a single integrated bus system through a variety of mechanisms and iterations. Specifically, in 2005, the County Board of Commissioners created the Kalamazoo County Transportation Authority (KCTA) to plan and oversee countywide transit. In 2006, the KCTA proposed the first-ever millage for countywide demand-response and line haul outside of the Kalamazoo city limits. The voters of the county responded by approving the millage, which was renewed in May 2009. In the interim, however, when the KCTA sought voter approval for a higher universally applied rate to cover all line haul and demand response service within the County (a single public transit millage rate for all county taxpayers), it was resoundingly defeated. Taxpayers desired a differentiated tax rate for a differentiated level of service. Kalamazoo City voters have continued to support a separate millage rate in their jurisdiction for their line haul service, under the Metro Transit Authority.

I have been a Kalamazoo County Commissioner since 2001 and have been very involved in the discussions about and creation of the KCTA from the beginning, often in a leadership role. It has consistently been the vision of the County to create a single efficient countywide transit authority where the level of taxation better mirrors the level of service provided – essentially a two-tiered system. Another way to view this is the overlay of two authorities, one encompassing the urbanized core receiving line haul service at one millage rate, and one comprised of the entire county (primarily paying for demand response service) at another millage rate, but both under a single, efficient operating umbrella. It is the ability to continue to work with our taxpaying citizens toward this goal of greater fairness and sustainability that we ask for your support of this legislation.

True intergovernmental consolidation is not easy, because of statutory and constitutional barriers, and because legitimate and reasonable differences exist among different political jurisdictions over levels of service, rates of taxation, distribution of revenues, and control and management of services. Kalamazoo County is no different, but we have worked closely together to manage this mine field. These two bills, if passed into law, will permit Kalamazoo County to continue its evolutionary walk towards full consolidation. **They will permit and make it easier to levy different amounts of taxation to support differing levels of service by affected citizens and jurisdictions, and to better integrate governance of the system.**

On behalf of Kalamazoo County, I respectfully urge you to report these bills to the full House, and to support their eventual adoption. Thank you.

cc: Representative O'Brien
Representative McCann
Senator Schuitmaker
Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners and Administration
Kalamazoo County Transportation Authority